

“We found there are many community agencies concerned with school safety and that is good,” said Beatty. “But we need to make sure these agencies are working together and communicating well to coordinate their efforts and planning for all types of emergencies.”

According to the review, information sharing is also crucial to preventing school violence. Studies show that in most violent campus incidents suspects tell someone what they are planning. If students, parents and teachers know what to do when they hear of a threat, they are in a better position to help prevent incidents from occurring.

North Carolina has been proactive in this area, setting up a toll-free safe schools tip line so students, parents and others can anonymously report threats or suspicious activity at schools. The report recommends increased public awareness of the tip line. That number is 1-888-960-9600.

The Center for the Prevention of School Violence, the Board of Education and the State Bureau of Investigation separately collect data on school violence or crimes on campus. The review recommends that the Center and the State Board compile this information into one report so school districts and local law enforcement officials have timely data to develop better safe school plans.

In addition, the review recommends that all school districts have school safety plans in place and are conducting exercises to test those plans. Furthermore, the report recommends new legislation be drafted to require regular drills and exercises for dealing with threats such as school shootings, chemical explosions, severe weather and terrorism incidents. Current law only requires monthly fire drills at schools.

It is important that these plans include providing training for faculty, staff and students on how to assist school staff, school resource officers and other emergency responders. Students, who often are in a position to get early hints of potential trouble, need to know how to recognize warning signs of a threat, who to talk to when they spot a troubling situation and be confident they can speak to someone in authority who will be understanding and reassure them that they are doing the right thing to protect others.

Other recommendations from the school safety review include:

- Providing technical assistance from state law enforcement to help schools conduct security assessments of campuses;
- Identifying key agencies, such as mental health responders, by the Department of Health and Human Services to be dispatched to help cope with emotional and psychological needs of staff and students after a violent incident;
- Adopting a formal debriefing process by state education, law enforcement and health services agencies to help local school and law enforcement officials improve their response plans.

The school safety review was conducted with assistance from the Department of Crime Control and Public Safety, the Attorney General’s Office, State Board of Education and Department of Public Instruction, the Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention’s Center for the Prevention of School Violence, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Office of the State Fire Marshal, and Sen. Pete Bland of Craven County and Rep. Joe Kiser of Lincoln County, both former sheriffs.

A copy of the report can be found at: www.governor.state.nc.us/News/PressReleases.

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